

Fish- House Ramblings

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"Ramblings" is perhaps the right word for what follows, those mainly interested in Guppy culture may be better skipping the first five paragraphs, well here goes.....

My interest in freshwater tropical fish keeping started while I was still at school in about 1959 with one tank in my parents lounge, this was ok 'till the tank sprung a leak, I was then banished along with the tank. When the local scout troop obtained a new scout hut I bought the old one for the timber, transporting it home on a wheelbarrow. With the timber I made a shed about 8x6, scrounged a few tanks and an old paraffin heater, I was away. I must say that the local Aquatic Society was thriving and the help a young lad received from the "old hands" was just great.

Years later, having married and set-up home, our house just happened to have a small brick outhouse about 8x6. As soon as I got permission this was set up as my second fish-house, angle iron tank frames bought via mail-order, glass bought locally and glazed with putty. Heating was by way of Kelly lamps under each tank, each tank stood on an asbestos sheet. I bred all the usual egg layers including angels, tiger barbs etc., all went well until I went on holiday and a neighbour, who kindly volunteered to look after the fish-house, unfortunately managed to set it on fire.

Sometime later my next fishkeeping venture was to build a polished wood stand to hold four tanks, the tanks being my first all glass tanks. This was a limited success since there was not really enough room to carry out much fish breeding and because they were in the house there was a constant pressure to keep the tanks "clean and tidy".

Next, after a house extension produced a small room between the office and garage, which I intended to use as a tool store/workshop, but it was not long before tanks were fitted along one wall and general freshwater tropical fish keeping started again. After a while it developed that the only fish I kept were Fancy Guppies, no doubt encouraged by a visit to the World Guppy Championship in Germany in 2005.

However space and heating in this arrangement were not ideal, and so the tools etc. were banished to the garage and the walls were lined with polystyrene backed plasterboard. New racks were built from 2"x2" timber on each side of the room; this was not easy given that there were original tanks in situ while the work was carried out. The timber frames were gloss painted to seal the timber and then given a top coat of emulsion to give a finish that is easy to touch up as wear and tear takes effect.

The Fish-house is brick built fully insulated, with racks either side, and a door at each end. The size is only 6ft 9" (2.06) x 7ft 9" (2.36). The left-hand rack has four tiers with six tanks in each row (12 litres, 21 litres, 37 litres and 53 litres respectively). The right-hand rack also has four tiers but with four tanks in each row (12 litres, 18 litres, 33 litres and 46 litres). All tanks are set "end on" with each row set back from the row below to give a tiered effect, this

means that space between rows can be reduced yet access is still reasonable. It also means that the overall height can be reduced; access to the top tanks is also helped by a three brick high wall running the full length of the room on each side in front of the bottom tanks. Condensation has been a problem in the past but these new tanks, forty in all, were bought from Brian Chittenden who makes particularly well fitting lids to keep condensation in. The right-hand rack is shorter because a Belfast sink is fitted at low level with hot and cold-water taps, two shelves are fitted above, the top one holding a small fridge and the other the brine shrimp hatchers. Sliders to hold plastic bins under the bottom tanks, one to use as a rubbish bin and others to store all the paraphernalia of fish-keeping, plus shelves above the top tanks on either side to store replacement box filters completes the structure.



Left-hand side, also showing water fill pipe and valve

Right-hand side

Heating: Two 36" tubular heaters (one each side) controlled by two thermostats at head height, a small fan is fitted above each row to circulate air when the heaters come on. Because heater control is separate there is security should one heater/stat fail. Individual neon's show if each heater is on or off.

Air: An ample supply of air is supplied by an older version of the Hagen Hi-Blow 40 set high in the room, a ring main of 36mm plastic waste pipe serves the racks with plastic airline valves drilled and pushed in control the air to each tank. I managed to find valves that connect to the airline at right angles avoiding "kinks" in the airline feeding the tanks.



Air pump, Thermostats, Timers



Basic fan set high



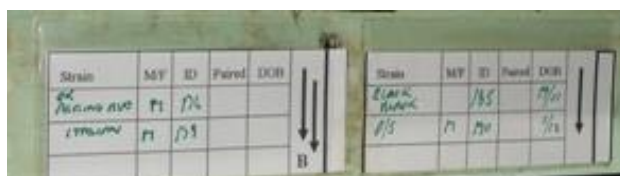
Wall, heater, under tank bin

Filtration: Basic box filters are half filled with ceramic rings and packed with the usual filter wool, two to each tank except for the smallest tanks. This enables one filter to be changed at a time avoiding an upset with the tank water. Soiled filters are replaced as required, but I have found recently it works well to leave the filters in for long periods without changing, Tops are left off the filters to allow the fish to graze. Clean spare filters are held ready; filters for cleaning then soaked overnight in the sink with about a half cup of thin bleach, then thoroughly rinsed and made ready for the next exchange. I have tried other filters including the latest Huey Hung sponge filters but, so far, I don't think I have found better for my purposes than the basic air driven box filter.

Water: If there is one thing I have found that has changed with fish keeping over the years it is the business of water changing, I can't remember so much being carried out years ago. However, guppies in particular seem to need water changes to thrive, I recently managed to find 80ltr plastic storage bins of a size that allowed me to accommodate three of them under the tanks, these are filled from a supply via the house combi boiler and the cold supply to a mixer valve that supplies (mostly) water at about 75 Fahrenheit. After at least 24 hours this water is used to re-fill the tanks after syphoning, the water being pumped by Eheim pumps. I try to remove only a small amount of water at a time but on a regular basis, the 240ltr storage allows me to change up to 20% if required. Water removal is combined with siphoning the bare tank bottoms since I tend to over feed. No treatment is made to the new water.

Lighting: No natural light unfortunately, a ceiling fluorescent with daylight tube is run 12 hours per day, controlled by a timer. Additional fluorescent light over the rows of tanks, switched on when required but controlled by timers to switch off if left on in error, that way I avoid green water. Only other light is a small fluorescent near the brine shrimp hatches, used as and when required and a small night-light to avoid total darkness.

Records: The system I use is described in an article on this site (Articles>Guppy Healthcare>Guppy development, health and diseases by Derek Jordan) I have adapted an idea of Malcolm Clarke's for the tank labelling and use self-adhesive name badge pouches and insert pre-printed labels on which I have handwritten fish details. These can often be slide-out of the pouch and moved with the fish, the arrows donate the row of tanks referred to on the label



Simple tank labels in self-adhesive holders on stands



Basic box filters, ready for a quick exchange.



Brine Shrimp Hatchers showing the plastic bases.

Feeding: Brine Shrimp of course. I use 2 litre plastic bottles with the bottoms cut-off, inverted and screwed into a plastic base (similar to the homemade timber bases I describe in earlier article on this site), the originals of these "San Francisco Bay" brand hatchers I bought in New York but Tim now sells them on his site, TA-Aquaculture, see links page. I aerate quite strongly, use two to three level teaspoons of cooking salt and one level teaspoon of brine shrimp eggs. Amounts and hatching time will vary depending on your water, eggs, temperature etc. After a few hours into the hatch I add a few drops of Kent Marine's "Zoecon" in an attempt to gut-load the brine shrimp. The only problem I have are if I fail to clean the hatchers after a hatch and the new hatch "goes off" caused by bacteria. The only other live food I culture is Micro Worm and the latest "Banana Worm" similar to Micro Worm but smaller size. I use glass butter dishes to keep the smells in and to enable easy cleaning.

Dried food, well I try them all I'm afraid, variety being the spice of life, but if I only had to have one it would probably be Tim's Red Crumb. I do try to include a Spirulina flake in the diet.

In frozen food I particularly like "Cyclops-ezze", expensive, but good.

Things I would do differently: Having the tanks in place and running I now realize that I could have made the two top tiers of tanks longer back to front. The smaller top tanks are ideal for fry drops and Brian's livebearer tank dividers save the youngsters when you miss the drop. But if they were a little larger they would have more uses and be easier to

maintain.

Most pleased with: Must be the Belfast sink with hot and cold running water and the water control valve, makes water changes, cleaning etc. so much easier and therefore more likely to be kept up.

Mistakes I continue to make: Well there must be many, but two I do time and time again is: keep too many strains and trying to grow on too many fish from a drop when I know that about 8/10 males at three months old is the optimum number for growth in a 36 litre tank. Still, if it were easy I sure I would soon get bored with the hobby.



Jewel 120 show tank - Often the home of male Guppies that just might grow into something great!

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To submit your questions and comments on the article direct to the author email:
derrick.clayton@ntlworld.com